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The Thoreau Society, Inc. is an informal gathering of students and admirers of Henry David Thoreau. Frederick Wagner, president; Marian Wheeler, vice-president; Mary Anderson, treasurer; and Walter Harding, secretary. address communications to the secretary at State University College, Geneseo, N.Y. 14454. Dues, \$10 a year; Friend, \$15; Family, \$25; and Life membership, \$100. Dues should be sent to the Thoreau Society, 156 Belknap St., Concord, Mass. 01742. The society also sponsors the Thoreau Lyceum at that address.

THE QUINTESSENTIAL WANDERER by Ann Zwinger
(1984 Presidential Address)

Since Time quoted me on the virtues of wandering, letters I have received make me suddenly aware of the number of wanderers in this country: "professionals" who write that they've wandered hundreds of miles in the Sierra Nevadas, and "closet types" who have wandered for the simple joys of wandering and no longer feel the need to hide their desultory proclivities.

I must admit that my years of wandering have been done somewhat surreptitiously. Wandering is frittering away your time. Within the confines of the Puritan work ethic in which I was raised, to wander from east to west or especially from north to south, is reprehensible, possibly immoral, and "nice girls don't," as my mother used to say.

Nevertheless I have continued to do so because I have been more than repaid with renewed productivity, fresh insights, and the joys of oblivion. Because it's such a private occupation, I never realized that it was such a national pastime, and that started me thinking about wandering in serious terms. With The Thoreau Society meeting imminent, I could not help but focus on the quintessential wanderer, Henry David Thoreau.

I betook myself to Thoreau's journals for a lesson in wandering, or as Thoreau often called it, "rambling." For of all the things Thoreau is known for, perhaps wandering is at the root of what he achieved, the most obvious and yet the most unsung facet of his life.

Let me define what I think wandering is by saying what I think it is not. You cannot wander if you have to get someplace. You cannot wander if you're in a hurry. If you're on your way to a surveying job, you are not wandering. You're not wandering when you're walking the dog.

It's more difficult to say what wandering is. Wandering is a ticket to another level of being. It requires learning how. It resents interruption. The appropriate environment is important; not many of us wander in a parking lot (although I suspect, that in a pinch, I could). The ideal place to wander is out-of-doors, at one's own time and one's own pace. As John Steinbeck put it, walking "is the proper pace for a naturalist . . . We must have time to think and to look and to consider."

Thoreau did not start out as a wanderer. The early journals of 1837 are filled with neat entries "Harmony," "Crickets," "Bravery," "Heroism," "Suspicion," "Virgil," "The Fog." This compartmentalization is a clever psychological device by which a writer separates himself from his reader.

In his early entries, Thoreau's text is largely philosophical. He pontificates. If there are glimmers of good natural observation, they are invariably secondary to moralizing - he hears a robin

singing at sunset on April 25, 1841, and "cannot help contrasting the equanimity of Nature with the bustle and impatience of man."

These early notes are also rather sparse and patchy, and not a little self-conscious. Paragraphs are short. His mind is in a hurry to grow up. The tentativeness of spirit betrays the writer who has neither found himself nor established an easy rapport with his reader. Nor accepted the writer's necessity of communicating.

Contrast this early journal with that of, for instance, 16 years later, May, 1853. The entries are almost solid nature writing, some of them ten pages in length. Because he has focused outward, he has relaxed. Because his observation is so impeccable, the reader enthralled tracks him with equal ease and anticipation.

But I am wandering. I found the first entries that denote a wandering frame of mind until almost a year after he took up residence at Walden in July, 1845. And this I understand: one brings all one's civilized baggage to the wilderness. I remember 20 years ago, when we first came to our place in the mountains. I spent all my time pruning recalcitrant bushes in order to create comfortable paths. It takes time not to prune bushes.

And so with Thoreau. The clustered, predominantly philosophical essays continue, but gradually longer and longer passages of pure observation creep in. By March 26, 1846, he is writing a lovely well-observed description of some length about the change from "foul weather to fair" as he sits in the snugness of his house and observes the outer world in a kind of passive mental wandering.

Four years later, Thoreau was walking on a regular basis:

I can easily walk ten, fifteen, twenty, any number of miles, commencing at my own door, without going by any house, without crossing a road except where the fox and mink do.

And to me, the first entries that are loud and clear wandering, as far as I'm concerned, are those undated ones of 1850. One begins,

In all my rambles I have seen no landscape which make me forget Fair Haven.

He continues a few pages later,

As I walked, I was intoxicated with the slight spicy odor of the hickory buds and the bruised bark of the black bird, and, in the fall, the pennyroyal.

He concludes with a stunning description of the "various kinds of life which a single shallow swamp will sustain."

In that year of 1850, Thoreau begins identifying his walks. Sometimes he was on surveying business, or going to deliver a lecture. But most of the time no goal is specified. And on those walks,

his business was wandering. On September 11th he "walked to White Pond in Stow;" on October 9th he "plucked a wild rose at Fairhaven."

At the end of October he wrote, "You must walk like a camel which is said to be the only beast which ruminates when it walks." Spoken like a true, dedicated, competent, professional wanderer.

And for the most part he wandered alone. Solitude is, as far as I am concerned, one of the prerequisites of wandering. As Thoreau wrote,

By my intimacy with nature I find myself withdrawn from man. My interest in the sun and the moon, in the morning and the evening, compels me to solitude.

Quite obviously Thoreau did a lot more wandering in summer than in winter, and the destinations are all the familiar names that become euphonic in the listing: Conantum and "the Cliffs," Lee's Bridge and the Red Bridge, Second Division Brook and Pantry Brook, Cedar Hill and Clamshell Hill, Tarbell's Swamp and Ministerial Swamp.

I think it would be fun for someone with an analytical bent to tabulate how many times Thoreau went where. I made a rough count up until 1858 and found that he visited familiar places such as Conantum quite regularly, several times a month, interspersed with jaunts farther afield. Of course. This too is one of the important facets of wandering: if a place is too new, the discoveries are too many and the mind becomes overloaded; if the place is too small and too familiar, the mind can become oblivious. The ideal is a site whose outlines you know, that you can visit seldom enough not to become non-seeing, but often enough to note its progressions and changes. Then there needs to be the right spacing, the right cadence in visits for the mind to perceive at its keenest.

As Thoreau's knowledge of what he is seeing grows, so do his perceptions. So do the length of his entries. So does the richness of his observation. This raises, for me, an interesting professional point: one thing one does not do when one wanders is write it down. That would be disruptive, the physical act of writing intruding upon concentration and focus. The only solution is to write it all down when you get back to paper and pencil, to re-walk where you've been. And so Thoreau, with his beautifully disciplined mind, and, I suspect, his own mnemonic devices, couldn't remember everything he saw, and "I forgot to say . . ." and "I forgot to mention. . ." sprinkly his pages, making him seem terribly human, stumbling over the wealth of his own words.

Thoreau was very aware of the psychology of wandering; he wrote November 28, 1850,

I feel a little alarmed when it happens that I have walked a mile into the woods bodily, without getting there in spirit. I would fain forget all my morning's occupation, my obligations to society. But sometimes it happens that I cannot easily shake off the village; the thought of some work, some surveying, will run in my head, and I am not where my body is. I am out of my senses. In my walks I would return to my senses like a bird or a beast. What business have I in the woods, if I am thinking of something

out of the woods?

Thoreau's recognition that a certain discipline is involved in wandering gave me a whole new perspective. He speaks, and rightly so, about the intrusion of the outer world and its inappropriateness.

In doing so, Thoreau notes the difference in state of mind. That state is now identified as the Alpha state. His wandering clearly shows his preparation to enter this heightened awareness and the free flow of his words and the acuteness of his observation show the glory that he felt in being there.

The variation in amplitude and frequency of brain waves is believed to be correlated with describable psychological and physical states. Alpha waves were the first identified. Right now all of us here are in a Beta state, concentrating on the immediate present. In a deep sleep (in which I hope no one is in at the moment), your brain waves are identified as Delta.

Alpha waves are related psychologically to a heightened awareness and sensitivity, an increased intellectual ability and alertness, yet with a feeling of relaxation and ease, an effortless flowing of creativity, and a sense of remoteness from the everyday world.

Everyone in this gathering has been there - remember that time when you were working on something, everything was going supremely well, everything was falling into place so easily, and you felt just absolutely wonderful? You were in an Alpha state.

I am convinced that Thoreau was able to write so brilliantly because he made a practice of wandering. While wandering, he entered his own Alpha state. In other words, when Thoreau hit his stride as a wanderer, he hit his stride as a writer. He must have learned, early on, of the psychological beneficence of wandering, that when his eye was busy, his mind was free to play with new connections and perceptions.

But you don't have to be a writer to wander. I suspect that a withdrawal from man's society into that of nature's is our great safety valve, and one of the most immediate reasons for retaining our wildernesses. The benefits of wandering are for all of us.

For Thoreau, who found his ease not with others of his kind but within the turrets of pine trees and the mirrors of rivers, wandering was a necessity. Nevermind that the Concord work-ethic world judged him irresponsible. He fell into a pattern of wandering that heightened his capacity to perceive, and led directly to his development as a writer.

Wandering is a solitary practice, yet those of us who are wanderers can never walk alone. We walk with those who have gone before, and found their sanity where we find ours: in the dew-frosted thistle or the dragonfly's patrol, in the coiled fern frond or the summer rose. There is no beginning and no end in the naturalist's world, and there is constant assurance of a place in that continuum. We need to know that there is purpose and worth and reason in living, and it can be found beneath the sibilance of the summer leaves, within the six-spoked crystals of winter, in the bee-beset willow catkins of spring, and the smokey skies of autumn.

Thoreau, once he found that world of infinite reason, never left that intimacy, and reaches out to entice us to wander. He could have given us no greater gift.

AN ANNIVERSARY AT LEE'S CLIFF -
A THOREAU FAVORITE 125 YEARS AFTER
AN ESSAY WITH ETCHINGS
by Ryland Loos

It is remarkable . . . a phrase often used to begin sentences by that now famous son of Concord, Massachusetts, Henry David Thoreau. In his usage it seems to mean something more than the uncommon or extraordinary. He used it so frequently in his own way that I consider it to be his phrase and have had reservations about using it in my writing. Beyond exact definition it reflects his abounding enthusiasm for incidents of a kind that went largely unnoticed and unrecorded by others of his time. Thoreau's swift hand committed them to his journals in beautifully descriptive detail. The journals are extensive and within them are passages of great truth that reveal to me more the greatness of the man himself than does "Walden," the book on which his reputation is based.

In the length of his journals I found no account more glowing with his enthusiasm than that of the stormy day of May 29, 1857. On that day, "A fine-grained air, June-like day, after a cloudy rain-threatening or rainy morning," Thoreau walked in the early afternoon from the house of his parents, where he lived in Concord, to Lee's Cliff, overlooking Fair Haven Pond, a widening of the Sudbury River. At 4:30, on the perfectly smooth pond reflecting the light and shade of the clouds, he noted the incessant dimpling of fishes and the long harrow-like ripples behind muskrats. As he examined the flowers of a black oak overhanging the top of the cliff, he thought he heard the sound of flies against his hat. But "No, it is scattered rain-drops." Down the cliff he found shelter. "I stand under a large projecting portion of the cliff, where there is ample space above and around, and I move about as perfectly protected as under a shed," and "I sit at my ease and look out from under my lichen-clad rocky roof, half way up the cliff under the freshly leafing ash and hickory trees on to the pond, while the rain is falling faster and faster, and I am glad of the rain, which affords me this experience." The next day he wrote "When first I had sheltered myself under the rock I began at once to look on the pond with new eyes, as from my house. I was at Lee's Cliff as I had never been before, had taken up my residence there, as it were. Ordinarily we make haste away from all opportunities to be where we have instinctively endeavored to get." To further emphasize how moved he was by this experience two days later on June second he wrote, "It was a portion of the natural surface of the earth which jutted out and became my roof the other day. How fit that nature should thus shelter her own children."

When I first read these words on an early May evening after having, in previous weeks, gone through the bulk of his journals, it was obvious that something in this experience had impressed Thoreau (to a degree perhaps unexceeded by any in his lifetime, not excluding his famous stay at Walden Pond). He had shared this experience with me as few writers could, as if it had happened only yesterday and I had been there myself, when, in fact, it had been - how long? A quick calculation revealed that in a few weeks it would be 125 years to the day. Immediately I knew that nothing would do but to be on Lee's Cliff at 4:30 P.M. on May 29.

At 2:00 p.m. on the 29th of May, 1982, after peering through a hedge to read the plaque on the house on Main Street where Thoreau lived his last years and died I began the six mile round trip on foot, following his route to the Cliff. I was but two years and as many months older than Thoreau at the time of this walk five years before his untimely death at age forty-four, and was confident of making Lee's Cliff by 4:30, as he had done, even if I lingered along the way, as was his practice. As I walked I reflected on the other similarities in our lives on this date and 125 years before. We both lived in the upstairs of a house not our own on a Main Street in a small village. We had never married or had families and therefore could follow that different drummer without sacrifice to others. I took comfort in knowing that Thoreau would approve of one who gave up commercially lucrative jobs to scratch thin lines on metal plates in search of poetry.

Down Thoreau Street, a name that would, no doubt, surprise him now, I passed signs for Superior Muffler, Concord Auto Parts, Middlesex Cleaners and the Concord Depot with its many shops of smaller signs. Beyond a BP Station sign I turned down the present Sudbury Road, Thoreau's Corner Road, and crossed the railroad tracks that he had so often followed to Walden Pond. A dozen signs in the next block ended on the left with a Stop and Shop and on the right with a Waltham Federal Savings and Loan. Near the latter site a blacksmith's



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shop, the last building at the edge of the village, had stood in Thoreau's day. At Grant Street all commercial signs ended; residences prevailed. Purple rhododendrons bloomed in every third yard as splendidly as they did by Thoreau's plaque.

A small sign at Route 2, a major arterial to Boston, commanded, "To cross road push button and wait for walk sign." The delay indicated a decided favoritism for the cars. Fifty must have passed from four directions before I crossed alone. Had this road and crossing in its present form existed in Thoreau's time, his entry for the day would have been several pages longer to cover it fully.

Thoreau mentions seeing only one other walker on the Corner Road, a man who had come from Newton on the train and was headed for the farm of La-Fayette Garfield to graft apples when Henry, obviously a fast walker, overtook him; and, in his usual curious way, engaged him in a discussion on the relative merits of different kinds of apples. In 1982 cars sped by, several or more per minute, but pedestrians equalled the number in 1857. Our conversation involved not Baldwins and Porters but bass, perch and pickerel, on pursuit of which he had been engaging on the banks of the Sudbury River. Just past Thoreau's Hubbard's Bridge I took the first left not far from the Corner Spring where, with the short, thick set grafter he had "sat and talked a spell."

In Thoreau's day except for "the old house on Conantum" that was "fast falling down," no buildings existed along this portion of his route to Lee's Cliff. I walked through an extensive development of large modern houses with expanses of glass that opened their interiors to view. Beyond Thoreau's Bittern Cliff, to my delight, houses were no longer visible through the woods. From that point to the base of Lee's Cliff the path, kept open no doubt by local children, looked much as it must have done to Thoreau. As the angle of view of the island in Fair Haven Pond, my guide to relative position, changed, the suspense as to what I might find at the cliff increased. Would there be a house on top? A parking lot? A picnic table? A "No trespassing;" sign? Would it be crowded with Thoreau enthusiasts observing the day? As the slope on the right increased, the path continued to follow the water and ignore the cliff. A short, but steep bushwack to the right around the escarpment brought me to the site that, according to Herbert W. Gleason's 1906 map, had to be the summit of Lee's Cliff.

The site was a solitary, beautiful woods still wet from the morning rains. Moccasin flowers in full bloom were scattered through the area with a particularly large clump behind a rounded gray formation of rock, the obvious spot where Thoreau had sat so many times observing the pond. I saw a



number of plant species noted by him on his May 29th. Perhaps the most interesting was exactly seventeen paces from the rock. Here "the fine red mammillae galls stud the black cherry leaves." The identity of one plant with long linear leaves and seed pods was puzzling so I collected a specimen, placing it with a number of not-for-sures. It later proved to be *Arabis glabra*, a rock-cress in the mustard family. Thoreau made no mention of it. He did, however, mention "*Turritis stricta* quite out of bloom" a species that I couldn't find in any plant references. A botanist friend, Werner Baum, solved the mystery with the discovery that *Turritis* was a now discarded name for *Arabis*. Plants usually keep their original names and most could be identified on the spot. Indeed, the view was the only real disappointment, amid a series of botanical comparisons. The oaks, ashes and hickories commented on in 1857 had grown or produced such a large progeny as to block out nearly all view of Fair Haven Pond. Its misty water was visible only in patches through the mature hardwood forest. The woodchoppers had not visited this area for a very long time. Their size suggested that a few of the larger trees may have been ones described as saplings by Thoreau. He himself had once counted 128 rings on an oak and 112 on a hickory stump similar in diameter to the largest of these. The limited view was, however, compensated for by the limited crowd. My thoughts went uninterrupted as had Thoreau's, as I celebrated this anniversary in an appropriate solitude.

I had arrived at the cliff at 4:12 eastern daylight time and remained to botanize on top until after 5:30, Thoreau's 4:30. During that time a drizzle's volume of pattering increased to that of a rain. No problem - I knew a shelter and dry it was, with the modest dimensions I had expected. It's location plus the fact that its floor contained about six square feet of the only dry leaves in the area left no doubt.

It was easy to understand the feeling of elation that had prompted Thoreau to sing his favorite song "Tom Bowling," as he stood in this shallow cave-like structure. For here was the ultimate in a shelter that would appeal to his sense for simplicity. It surpassed even his ten by fifteen foot hut on Walden Pond in this respect. But the singer of simplicity who had said that "A man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone," was a man of contradictions.

In spite of his philosophy of life and his confidence in an ultimate success to be judged, "In the course of generations" for a style of life by one "who will not conform because conformity to him is death," Thoreau longed to settle in a permanent home of his own. He would have liked one large enough to house his growing collection of natural history subjects and books. His hope, I am sure, was that his growing reputation as a writer would eventually make his dream financially possible. An interest in houses and home sites recurred in his journals with increasing frequency as years went by. In *Walden*, he wrote "The future inhabitants of this region, wherever they may place their houses may be sure that they have been anticipated." It would interest him today to see the many sites on Conantum where anticipated houses now stand. I suspect that his own favorite spot for a permanent dwelling would have been on Fair Haven Hill across the river where he once had thoughts of buying land.

A large house exists on this site today, visible from the pond. In my shelter from the rain I thought that his second if not first choice for a residence was possibly the only one without a building on it in 1982. This was the beautiful wooded area above my head on the summit of Lee's Cliff.

As the hardest rain of the day came down I raised my eyes along the line of the trunks before me until their tops were blocked from sight by the rock itself. Thoreau would have been pleased at this sight. The study of trees and their growth was the last and possibly great obsession of his life. The severe cold that he caught while counting rings on stumps on a bleak December third was the beginning of the final illness from which he never recovered. According to Walter Harding, his biographer, "The succession of forest trees" is Thoreau's major contribution to scientific knowledge. Its publication achieved the widest circulation of any of his shorter essays during his lifetime. To quote Harding, "Although others simultaneously were making the same discovery, Thoreau's research was independent and the conclusions he reached are still accepted. Most important to Thoreau himself was the fact that his discoveries solved the dilemma he had long faced when through his surveying activities he brought about the destruction of the Concord woods. Now he could point the way towards proper forest management, which would yield lumber and profit for the landowner and at the same time bring about proper reforestation and so preserve the woods." I thought of this reasonable rationalization and of the red ribbons of a type used by surveyors tied to trees at the edge of the cliff above my head. As to the possible significance of those ribbons, what would Thoreau the surveyor, the lover of nature, the searcher for a home have felt? What was their significance? Whatever the answers, I knew that I would not be back for the 150th anniversary.

The sun did not shine warm on my back as it had on Thoreau's as I returned to the house with the plaque in the village. It continued to drizzle or rain on and off under gray skies. The walk sign at Route 2 came on more promptly this time.

I had not seen the unobstructed view of Fair Haven Pond described by Thoreau, as I had hoped. Instead of a cuckoo, I had heard a mourning dove, though to me the mood of their song has always been similar. But, I had been sheltered from the rain by his rock and, all in all, of this particular day I will say without reservation: It was remarkable.

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- Lebeaux, Richard. THOREAU'S SEASONS. Amherst: Univ. of Mass. Press, 1984. 410pp. Now at last we have Lebeaux's long-awaited sequel to YOUNG MAN THOREAU, his Eriksonian study of Thoreau, carried on now from Thoreau's residence at Walden to the end of his life. As with any psychological analysis of the life of a man dead more than a hundred years, much is necessarily speculative and not conclusive. But Lebeaux presents a thoughtful portrait based on a minute examination of the written records that survive, a portrait that should cause most readers to re-think many of their notions about Thoreau. In fact, the book is far more important as a challenge to one's ideas of Thoreau than as a narrative of Thoreau's life. Its strongest point is its analysis of the breakdown in relations between Thoreau and Emerson. Nowhere else have I seen this problem dealt with so thoroughly and so convincingly. His study of the creation of WALDEN through its various drafts makes valuable use of Lyndon Shanley's earlier studies. His theories of the correlation between Thoreau's creativity and his generativity is, to say the least, interesting, though we are not fully convinced that Thoreau's creativity fell off as sharply as Lebeaux seems to think. We think his judgment of Whitman's impact on Thoreau somewhat over-emphasized, but his analysis of John Brown's impact well reasoned. The weakest portion of the book, perhaps, is his chapter on A WEEK. It is unfortunate that it is the first chapter of the book and thus may scare some people off. We would also quarrel with what we feel is his over-emphasis on Thoreau's awareness of the anniversaries of such events as the start of his trip on the WEEK. But these are all small points. THOREAU'S SEASONS is, we feel, a very important contribution to our understanding of Thoreau.
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- Myerson, Joel, ed. THE TRANSCENDENTALISTS: A REVIEW OF RESEARCH AND CRITICISM. New York: Modern Language Assoc., 1984. 534pp. For years we have needed a guide through the welter of scholarship about American Transcendentalism and the individual Transcendentalists. Now at last it has been provided in this excellent volume edited by Joel Myerson with each section done by a specialist in the field. There are five sections on various facets of the movement itself, twenty-eight sections on individual Transcendentalists, and eleven on the reactions of non-Transcendentalists such as Hawthorne, Dickinson and Melville to the movement and its members. Sections vary in length from two pages for a minor figure to twenty-six pages for Thoreau. Each evaluates all the important scholarship in the field--the editions, the biographies, the criticisms--both articles and books. Many locate the major manuscript collections and some point out work that needs to be done in the field. The section by Mich-

ael Meyer on Thoreau (pp. 260-285) is, as would be expected, excellent. It thoroughly covers the field and its evaluations are wise and just. It is the place to go now when one wants to know quickly what and where the Thoreau scholarship is. One should not overlook however the chapters on Dickinson, Hawthorne, Melville and Whitman for their commentaries on Thoreau. And of course both the general chapters on Transcendentalism and the chapters on the individuals are extremely helpful in filling in Thoreau's background. An excellent resource.

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Thoreau, Henry D. *JOURNAL: VOLUME 2: 1842-1848*. Edited by Robert Sattelmeyer. Princeton University Press, 1984. 602pp. This is the second volume of the new Princeton Edition of the journal and it contains almost twice as much as in the 1906 edition--material that the 1906 editors purposely omitted or that was not then available to them. The new material includes early drafts of *WALDEN*, *A WEEK*, *THE MAINE WOODS*, and of such essays as those on Carlyle and Wendell Phillips. These early drafts are of particular interest to students of Thoreau's techniques of composition and it is often enlightening how much Thoreau improved his wording as he revised. Much of the other material included, particularly the aphorisms we must confess are in large part a deadly bore and would never be considered worth printing were they not by HDT. The format and typography, as usual with the Princeton Edition is a delight, but the scholarly apparatus, more than a third of the book, tends to overwhelm the non-scholarly reader. One must, for example, look at seven different tables to check on the background and authority for any one line of text. But despite these misgivings, one must welcome these solid additions to the Thoreau canon.

A STROLL WITH HENRY DAVID THOREAU. Cincinnati: Gibson Greeting, 1973. Unpaged. Illustrated quotations from Thoreau.

We are indebted to the following for information submitted: R. Borst, J. Butkis, J. Dawson, R. Galvin, W. Glick, L. Gougeon, P. Hauser, R. Hoag, M. Fishette, V. Halbert, E. Johnson, D. Kamen-Kaye, A. Kovar, G. Lowden, T. Mansbridge, D. Moure, A. Small, R. Thompson, H. Uhlig, J. Vickers, and F. Wagner. Please keep the secretary informed of items he has missed and new items as they appear.

ANOTHER REVIEW OF "WHAT SHALL IT PROFIT?"

BY Bradley P. Dean

With Don Jordan's recent discovery of the lengthy *NANTUCKET INQUIRER* review, printed in the Winter 1984 number of this bulletin (TSB 166), we now know of two articles in contemporary newspapers which summarize the content of "What Shall It Profit?" -- the lecture which Thoreau delivered at least five times between December 1854 and December 1856, and which was eventually to become "Life without Principle." The other review appears in the (Worcester) *NATIONAL AEGIS* for January 10, 1855 and is reprinted below.

Taken together, there are 178 sentences in these two reviews which summarize the lecture, but I have found that nineteen of the sentences in each review duplicate each other. Hence, when arranged in order, a 159-sentence composite summary of "What Shall It Profit?" can be produced from these two reviews -- a fair number when one considers that there are only 351 sentences in "Life Without Principle."

Lyceum Lectures

The lecture on Thursday evening, 4th inst., was by HENRY THOREAU, Esq., of Concord, Mass. Subject:--THE CONNECTION BETWEEN MAN'S EMPLOYMENT AND HIS HIGHER LIFE. The following is an outline:

The farmer is a worthy subject for an epic, when he cultivates at the same time his land and himself, so as to secure the best progress, physical and spiritual. But our farmer is a mere SPECULATOR in a sense in which, that word has not found a place in any dictionary. His SPECULUM is a shining dollar. Few have character or courage enough to live away from the road and independent of others. The farmer's words are not published, nor are his acts reported. Hence work is cheap while thought and character are dear. And in old age the farmer looks back upon his monotonous life, unconscious of having ever planned a better. The stone cutter labors slowly and patiently till he has transformed nature by his art. But he has no resolution for moral duties. Such toil has no dignity. Man had better retire to the forest and spend his time there in learning of nature better things for himself than to cut down that forest for his gain, making earth bald before her time. He should not work for money but for the love of work. -- His connection with society is slight and transient and so

are his obligations to it. There is nothing worth living for, if one spends his whole time in society. It is the great art of life to turn the surplus life of the soul into life for the body.-- One should get a living by loving his work.-- Most lives are in this respect failures. There is little or nothing written about GETTING A LIVING. This theme should be inviting and glorious. It might be pertinent to ask how Plato got his living, and whether he succeeded better than other men in putting down difficulties. Many are contented to live by luck, and contribute nothing to the welfare of society. The good of life is not to be raffled for. The gold-digger is the enemy of the honest laborer, and his life gives all its influence against the influence that true labor must have upon the soul. The battle of freedom is not only political but economical and private. Commerce has very insignificant cords. It is hardly worth while to risk the lives of a crew to secure a cargo of juniper berries and bitter almonds. -- Politics are unworthy of attention, for their tendency is to enfeeble the mind. Politics are the GIZZARD of society, full of dirt and gravel. When this organ is diseased, society is dyseptic. It is time for men to cease being dyseptics and rising to tell each other their bad dreams; and begin to be euptics, and speak only of the beautiful and glorious morning. Few intellectual men are unbound by institutions. In conversation men are always ready to fall back upon institutions for support instead of being independent. The great mass of people live only on the surface. All the thoughts of the multitude are superficial. No one thinks for himself. Conversation degenerates into gossip when people resign their inward life. They depend upon news and so gain the whole world and lose their own souls. "No man can serve two masters." As distant things call off the mind it ceases to be fixed upon what is near.-- The newspaper is the only evangelist of most men. What we call news is not the offering of genius. It is only stale tradition in a new dress. It is the history of men at the same period of development with ourselves. The annals of a savage tribe would not furnish materials for a newspaper. Men are willing to fill their minds with rubbish. They should strive to preserve their mental chastity: there is a certain criminality in listening. It is often hard to forget what it is useless to remember. Our thoughts are all tinged with triviality. We ought to heal our minds as children whose guardians we are. We should read not the TIMES but the ETERNITIES.

NECROLOGY

We note with great sadness the death of Reginald L. ("Doc") Cook, Professor Emeritus of American Literature at Middlebury College, Director Emeritus of the Bread Loaf School, and President of the Thoreau Society in 1967-1968. He was a pioneer Thoreau scholar. His two books about Thoreau, *THE CONCORD SAUNTERER* (1940) and *PASSAGE TO WALDEN* (1949) were models of scholarship and both thoughtfully provocative. "Doc" will be remembered by all who knew him as a gentle, sweet soul who inspired both his students and his friends to a deeper, more thoughtful understanding of Henry Thoreau.

We note also with sadness the death of Warren Titus, Professor Emeritus of English at Vanderbilt University, a life member of the Thoreau Society and a frequent attendee at the annual meetings.

THE MLA THOREAU SOCIETY MEETING

The winter meeting of the Thoreau Society held in conjunction with the annual convention of the Modern Language Association will be held on Thursday December 27th from 7 to 9:30 p.m. in Washington, D.C., in the Vermont Room of the Sheraton Hotel. The meeting, chaired by Richard Schneider, will be devoted to Thoreau's CAPE COD, and will consist of papers by Joseph J. Moldenhauer, Joan Burbick, Debra Fried, and Ronald Hoag.

NOTES AND QUERIES

The editors of CORRESPONDENCE in the new Princeton University Press edition of THE WRITINGS OF HENRY D. THOREAU would appreciate hearing from owners of letters to or from Thoreau who have not already been approached by this editorial project or by Walter Harding. They would also welcome information about the location of other Thoreau manuscripts, particularly those tipped into the first volume of the 800 sets of the Manuscript and Deluxe Walden Editions of 1906. Send information to Elizabeth Witherell, Dept. of English, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA 93106.

According to a syndicated article by Ray Jenkins [LINCOLN [Neb.] JOURNAL & STAR, Jan. 22, 1984], Nebraska clergyman Everett Sileven quoted Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience" in defying what he felt to be government interference with his Sunday school.